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THE ANTI-UNION.

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No. V.

TO THE
EDITORS *of the* ANTI-UNION,

GENTLEMEN,

I AM a plain man, and from my infancy have been bred up to business. I look upon the character of a Merchant to be one of the highest and most independent in the nation, and all my pursuits and objects, have been in the commercial line.—I am no politician, but love our most gracious Sovereign, respect his Ministers, and obey his Laws. It is neither suitable to my talents or profession, to look into matters deeper than as they concern myself. When I heard first, that an Union of the Parliaments of England and Ireland was to be *obtained*, and that Ireland was to get vast trading advantages, as a reward for letting her part of the Legislature sit in London—I own it made me very happy. It was said that the same commercial benefits, which have made England the richest and most powerful nation in the world, were to be given to Ireland, in consequence of an Union. I confess I could not conceal my joy, and I began to speculate on amassing prodigious wealth. My Partner, who is a man of much prudence and knowledge, smiled at my rhapsodies, and asked me, “What precise plan I had formed for extending our trade upon any farther commercial advantages, that may be granted to this country, by the English Parliament?” “I am not prepared yet,” said I, “I have not had time to calculate. but I am sure there must be many sources of wealth open to English Merchants, that we are deprived of, all of which we should obtain by an Union.—My Partner replied, “That he would not enter into the merits of an Union, upon any principle at present, but that of commerce, and of the further advantages in that line, that might be granted to Ireland in consequence of

it. He said, that already we possessed every benefit that England could bestow, except a very few, and these trifling; that when an Union was talked of long ago, England had much to give us in compensation for it; and we, without reflecting, now adopt the same argument, tho’ circumstances are totally changed. England has already, and with a liberality for which we ought to be grateful, given up to us every thing, that *then* might (by some) be considered as a fair price for an Union. That we had now a free and direct trade to all the world, as perfect as England—England and the East Indies alone excepted—that as to the East Indies, we have already more privileges of commerce there, than any of the great trading towns of England—for that some of the outward bound India ships were permitted regularly to touch at Cork, and take on board a certain number of tons weight of our goods. That if Ireland was allowed to trade directly to India, it was what she was quite incapable of. That even to the India Company, the mere trade did not pay its expences and their establishments, and was profitable only as the means of bringing home the immense produce of their territorial possessions. That Ireland stood at this moment in the same situation with respect to the East Indies with all England, except the chartered East India Company; of which, however, her Merchants could equally with those of London, become Members. As to the direct trade to England, or as it is commonly called, the Channel trade—it is in that alone, that it is possible to give us any further benefits. But let us see what they are, and how the case stands now, *without* an Union. We have already some little advantage, as to the West India trade, by our local situation, and all restrictions whatever on it, have lately been taken off. By a construction of a clause in the Navigation Act, and by other Statutes, the Irish were prohibited from carrying Plantation Goods to Britain, either from the West Indies

or Ireland. This was a great restriction, indeed, on our West India trade; but, by a late Act of Parliament, this is done away; and now Irish ships have the same privileges as English; and a Cork merchant can now send his ship to Jamaica, load her with sugar, rum, &c. &c. send her to Bristol, or bring her to Cork, and, if he finds that market overstocked, he can send her to Liverpool, or any other English port where his goods will be admitted on the same terms as if they came direct from the West Indies to Britain, and in an English ship. No grant of the English legislature can add a further privilege to this, and you have the plantation trade as free and open now, as it is possible to give it to you.

“Certainly, between England and Ireland there are some mutual restrictions still remaining, but I think that those which England has imposed on Irish goods imported into England are not of so much consequence as it is usually imagined, for, in general, they are laid on articles we have no probability of ever being able to send them.” “How?” said I, “and what are they? Surely the moderation of our taxes, the conveniences of fuel and water, but, above all, the cheapness of provisions, and, consequently of labour, may enable us, in time, to rival England in many articles, that we are now prevented sending her by legal restrictions.” My partner replied—“Do you know what these prohibited articles, or, articles loaded with duties equal to a prohibition, are?” I said not. “Then,” said he, “I will enumerate them to you, at least all those that are of the smallest possible consequence. They are hats, rape, and linseed oil; hard-ware, earthen-ware, coals, cheese, woollen cloths, glass bottles, printed linens, glass ware, wrought ivory, velvet, flockings, vinegar, iron, feathers, mixed cotton and linens, sail-cloth, cordage, beer, soap, starch, leather, refined sugars, candles, gun-powder, cyder, hops and wrought silks. For which of these shall we exchange our exports of beef, butter, pork, and wheat? or which of these think you will the Northern merchant prefer to his linen trade?

You see the greater number of them deserve no notice; they are commodities that we are obliged now to procure for our own consumption from England, though loaded with some duty, (generally 10 per cent.) and with the expence of freight, insurance, commission, &c. Of this description, are coals, hard-ware, refined sugars, hops, cheese, earthen-ware, wrought silks, and superfine cloths, &c. Could we send flow manufactured, and expensive silks for the changeable taste of a London market, to vie with the ready and ingenious artist of Spital-fields, who is on the spot, and can take advantage of every fluctuation of fashion? Is it likely we can send fine cloths to England, when our own gentry will not wear them here, though so much cheaper than those we get from England? Is it not ridiculous to talk of our contending in hard-ware with Birmingham, or, in earthen-ware with Staffordshire, from whence we are forced to bring them for our consumption, loaded with the expences of freight, insurance, commission, and duty? Perhaps, indeed, we might be able to send some coarse woollens to nearly the extent of what woollen yarn we now export; and some printed linens, cottons mixed with linen, cordage, or sail-cloth, or other articles, wherein the superiority we have in the linen manufacture might have its advantage; and these two articles, of the coarse woollens and printed, or mixed linens, are those alone in the whole catalogue that deserve any consideration, and to them we are to look for the sole commercial advantages we can derive from an Union. The superfine cloths are all made, or ought to be, of Spanish wool; and the English manufacturers, themselves, confess, we have not skill, or artificers, to contend with them in it. As to the coarser woollens, we use in our own consumption most of what wool we produce, except what we export in woollen yarn; and if all this was wrought up, and exported in woollen cloths, it would not be a matter of great consequence, but we must always have the power of a considerable export of linen and woollen yarn; or we will not have enough for our own manufactures, for,

if there was not a certain market for the redundancy of spun yarn over what we are able to weave, the spinners would be discouraged, by the apprehension of no sale for their yarn, and, in the next year, the weavers might not have enough for their demand—and this principle holds in every manufacture. As to the coarse woollens what makes it unlikely that we can rival England in them, is that in them the raw material is a great proportion of their value; and the wool of Ireland is worse considerably than that of England, and dearer in price, in the proportion of 10½d. to 6d. per pound, as positively affirmed by the English manufacturers in 1785. Of course, when our prosperity raises the price of labour, we can never expect to rival England in this article.

“With respect to those articles which make part of our linen manufacture, as printed linens, mixed cottons, &c. &c. if England was to lay aside, or equalize, all duties upon them, and the woollens, would we have any right to demand that she should continue the present bounty on the export of our linens, which was given us as a compensation for the exclusion of our woollens, and which, certainly, is a discouragement to her own linen manufacture, and particularly to that of Scotland? Our linen trade, as it stands at present, and encouraged by this bounty, is sufficient to employ the capital of the richest, and reward the speculation of the most adventurous trader, without contending, as we must do, in the other line of printed and cotton goods, with the power and opulence of Manchester, and the skillful establishment, capital, and machinery of the English artists. These manufactures are old, and firmly rooted in England. With us they are but in their infancy; and if all duties upon them were mutually taken off in England and Ireland, it would be the total destruction of all those branches of infant and unsettled manufacture, that would have to contend, on equal terms, with the old established ones of similar articles in Britain; and of these, none would engage in a more disadvantageous combat than the printed linens, cot-

tons, &c. This is proved by the testimony of the English Merchants themselves, who, when they were examined before the Lords of the Committee of Council, in 1785, on the Commercial Propositions, then depending between England and Ireland, did confess, that they had no apprehension of Ireland underselling them in their own market, in fine or coarse woollens, printed linens, or mixed goods, iron ware, or earthen ware, provided they were subject to equal duties, on import into England, with those then payable on import of similar articles into Ireland, and an equal duty on import of raw materials—as iron, cotton, &c. into either country.—The striking off all duties in both countries was much disapproved of by the Lords of the Committee of Council, and the system preferred was to diminish all duties then in existence to the standard of the country where they were lowest; and this *must* be the idea of any commercial arrangement between the two countries in case of an Union; and as the rates now stand this would leave a protecting duty of about 10 per cent. in general, besides insurance, freight, commission, &c. to all those English articles, we might hope to contend with them in, such as printed linens, mixed cottons, hard-ware, earthenware, &c. which the English Merchants, said, in 1785, would be sufficient to prevent a competition of the Irish Merchant in their own market.

“If, therefore, an Union is likely to do us little benefit to our export trade, see what injury must certainly result from it to our import. Indeed the Merchants begin to feel, that a great part of their trade in imported articles, for our home consumption, might cease, in consequence of the vast diminution of the numbers of our home consumers, which an Union in any possible shape, must necessarily create, by increasing the number of Absentees, almost beyond calculation, and it must always be remembered, that there is no nation in the world, where the gentry, or higher orders, so exclusively consume all the imported articles; and where the members of the differ-

ent branches of the Legislature, are so great a proportion of the Gentry, as in Ireland, and there is no country, therefore, in which the removal of her Legislature will take with it so great a number of the consumers of imported articles. The misfortune which the increase of Absentees will overwhelm all parts of this country with, is a matter of the deepest concern, and carries with it irresistible arguments against an Union, on this, however, we will talk some other time—I now only allude to the effects it will have on her commerce, and how severely it will be felt, by all our importing Merchants, in the first instance.

“As to the small taxes we pay, and the cheapness of labour, enabling us to vie with England in her own market, in certain of her articles of established manufacture; he continued, Tho’ at present our taxes are moderate, yet an Union would probably, in the first instance, and certainly in course of time, cause them to be put on the same footing with those of England; in the same examination of the English Merchants, in 1785, they said that one great cause of the cheapness of labour in Ireland, was, that candles, soap, leather, &c. were not excised in Ireland; these taxes, however, have already made some progress amongst us, and we have no reason to suppose, they will not increase.

“As to the cheapness of labour, it is true that the commonest kind of day labour, merely agricultural, is cheaper here; but the prices of all superior artists, are equal, and in some instances, higher—for skilful workmen in the difficult branches, are rarely to be found here—and must be brought from England. So that they have not only English wages, but the great expense of their removal, and establishment. But suppose actual labour be cheaper here than in England, and may possibly continue so, surely, however, the want of skill in the manufacturer, the habitual drunkenness, facility of intoxication, and unsettled manners of our peo-

ple, are more than a countervailing equivalent, and I really believe, the English Merchant can get his piece of work manufactured for as small a sum of money, as the Irish Merchant can get a similar piece done for, from the superior skill and diligence of the one, and the many disadvantages, want of skill, and confirmed habits, in the other, notwithstanding that wages may be, and provisions certainly are, cheaper in Ireland.”

My partner stopped, and I own I had no reply ready, and I was mortified at it; on which he proceeded, “I assure you this is my sincere opinion, and in point of the further extension of the privileges of commerce, England has now nothing to give, which in our situation, and with our produce we can take much benefit from, and which would make atonement to this country, for any surrender of importance. I begin to think that the advocates for an Union, will not insist that much benefit will result from it, to our trade, and will shift their arguments (tho’ with more fallacy, as I shall shew you some other time) to the advantages we may derive from it, in point of *protection* and *security*. The commerce of Ireland is adequate to more than its capital, but that capital is rapidly increasing, capable of great extension, and employed upon the best subjects of our produce and manufacture, and the nation has thriven accordingly.”

My Partner now ceased to speak, I said I would think of it, and I have given it much thought, and the more I consider it, the more I believe him in the right. I send you this, in hopes you will publish it in your useful and patriotic paper, as there may be many men in my situation, in Cork, Limerick, Belfast, and other great trading towns, who may not be lucky enough, to have a partner with equal knowledge—and who may be thereby tempted to wish for an Union, in hopes of commercial benefits, it never can bring with it.

A. MERCHANT.